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WLW
CINCINNATI

FORTUNES WASHED AWAY

1:15
P.M. - E.S.T.

A SERIES OF DRAMATIZATIONS OF BETTER LAND USE.

No. 162

"MAKING MOUNTAIN FARMING PAY"

May 31, 1941

ORGAN THEME: DEEP RIVER

VOICE

We took it for granted that land was everlasting;

We said ownership of the land meant security.

Tools would wear out, men would die--

But the land would remain.

ORGAN: ABRUPT DISCORD.

ANNOUNCER (cold)

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: DEEP RIVER.

ANNOUNCER

Like many another county, Grundy County, Tennessee, has been taking a terrific beating of which it had no choice--drouth. Springs dry up, wells cease to flow, pastures wither and forests burn. But unlike many another county, Grundy County is poor agriculturally. It has good farms in the valley, but most of the land is in the mountains, where mournful cedar thickets alternate with wasteland, rocky and gouged by gullies, where the people live in weathered shacks beside skimpy truck patches. But high on a windy hill, almost inaccessible by automobile, is a different farm--the farm of T. L. Cordell, scene of the 162nd consecutive episode of Fortunes Washed Away.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER

T. L. Cordell has not always been a mountain farmer. Thirty years ago, he operated a truck farm for his father in the Sequatchie Valley. But one day he drove up to the home...(FADE)

SOUND: Old car chugs up, comes to halt, door opens...

PHOEBE (calling off mike)

Les! What in the world are you doing back so soon?

SOUND: Man walking up steps...

PHOEBE

Les...is something wrong?

CORDELL

You see that car, don't you?

PHOEBE

Yes, but...(DISMAYED)...oh. You haven't sold anything.

CORDELL

The mine's closed...for good.

PHOEBE

Oh.

CORDELL

Closed for good.

FATHER (fading in)

...what's this I hear about the mine shutting down?

CORDELL

That's right, dad. And there goes our income--nearly every cent we've made we've made from stuff sold to the mine folks.

FATHER

Well, Les...I've heard it was coming. I didn't want to tell you till we knew for certain. You don't fret, son--I've got enough to take care of me, and you can--

CORDELL

You don't understand. I want to keep on farming. Fact is, I'd like a farm of my own, now that I'm married...

PHOEBE

Don't worry, Les...

CORDELL

That's easier to say than do.

FATHER (sarcastically)

You wouldn't want to farm that place of mine in Grundy County, would you?

CORDELL

I've never seen it--but yes, I would.

FATHER

Son, let me tell you something. Nobody would want that land. Folks say that any man living back in the cedars has got to scratch and sweat mightily--if he wants to starve decent. You're not used to mountain farming. I am. I don't want any part of it, and neither do you.

CORDELL

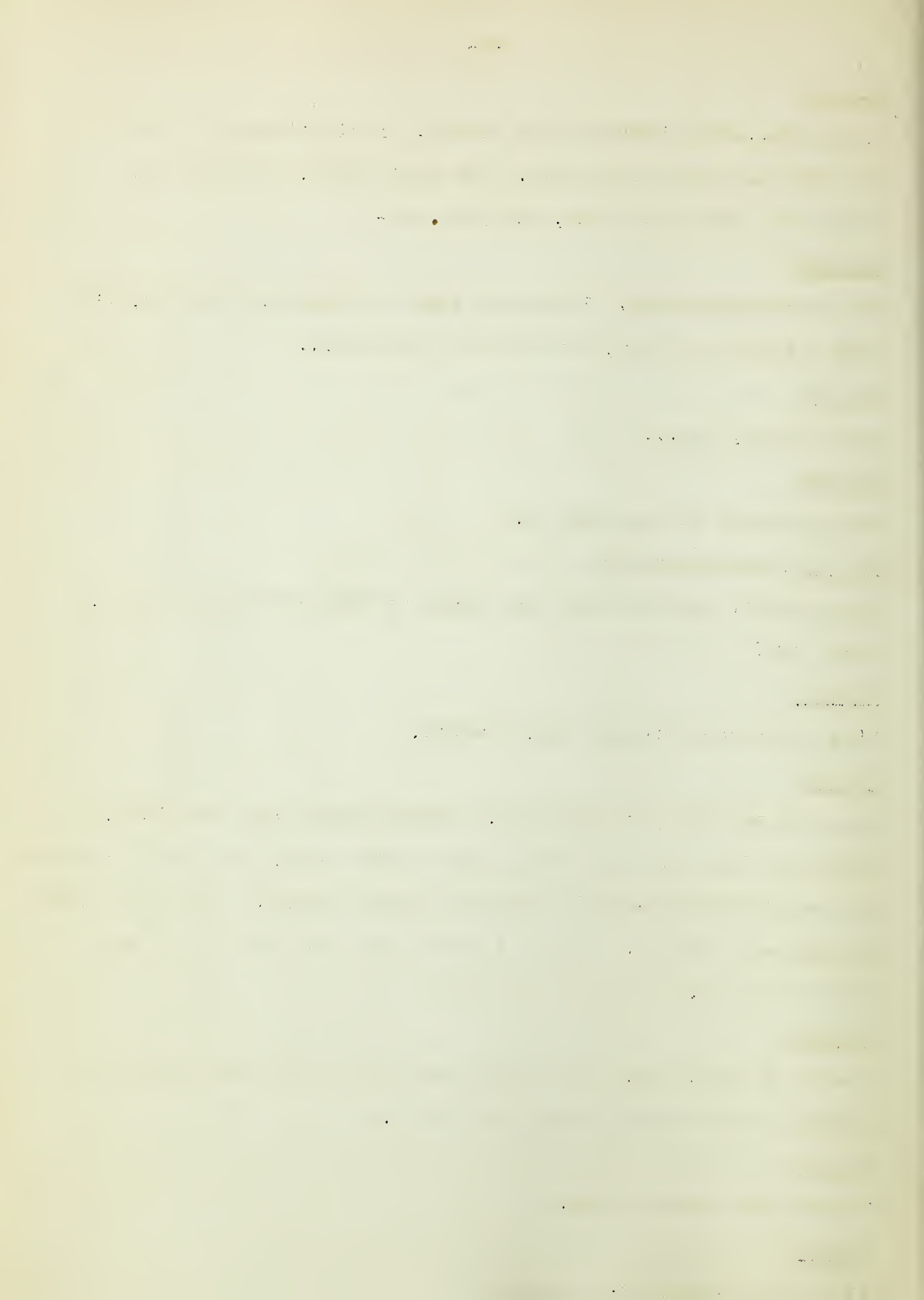
I want to farm, dad. If you'll start me out on that farm, I'll somehow, make enough to pay you for it.

FATHER

It wouldn't be very much.

PHOEBE

I'll do my share, Mr. Cordell.



FATHER

I know you would, Phoebe. But no--oh, all right. You kids have got determination. Go on up there--but don't blame me.

ORGAN BRIDGE: HIGH ON A WINDY HILL.

ANNOUNCER

Brave people, determined people, were Les and Phoebe Cordell--a young couple looking to the future--or was there a future? They wondered themselves, when they began life anew on this forlorn mountain farm. There were bleak days, humorous moments, too...for instance, there was the day when Les Cordell was clearing some of the sassafras from a field when...(FADE)

SOUND: Man whacking bushes with grubbing hoe...

PHOEBE (half sobbing, half laughing) (FADING IN)

Les! Les! Look what I got.

CORDELL

Why, of all things...put that down!

PHOEBE

Oh, no I won't--not after all the trouble I went to to kill him.

CORDELL

Phoebe, that's a skunk.

PHOEBE

I know it is, now--look at my dress.

CORDELL

But why did you do it?

PHOEBE

I'd heard of them, but I never had seen one before. I was walking over in the woods to look for some herbs, and I saw him run under a log. I figured his hide would sell for something.

CORDELL

Sure, but...whew!

PHOEBE

Well, I grabbed up a stick and hit him and then--first thing I knew, he hit me with that spray right between the eyes. My stick broke, but I kept swinging away until I killed him. Now you've got to skin him.

CORDELL

Oh, no! Not me.

PHOEBE

Then I'll take him over to Palmer like he is.

CORDELL (softly)

I'll skin him, Phoebe. If you've got the spunk to stay in there fighting after you've been hit. I'll do my part, too. Who knows, maybe his hide will bring enough to buy you a new dress--and a hat too!

PHOEBE

Sure it will, Les.

CORDELL (now disconsolate)

Do you think we'll ever make a go of it up here?

PHOEBE

Yes.

CORDELL

I do, too. But--well, there's the house, all the chinking daubing out of it. Here I am, with a wife, two pigs, twelve chickens and a blind horse. Here is a mountain country, where fields are cleared, wore out, and throwed away. There must be some manner of making a living up here--and, Phoebe, we'll find that way, if we have to do it with skunk hides!

ORGAN BRIDGE: HIGH ON A WINDY HILL.

ANNOUNCER

A wife, two pigs, twelve chickens and a blind horse--and determination. Les Cordell and Phoebe Cordell worked, worked hard. Each would help in the kitchen, each would help in the field. But there were days when...(FADE)

SOUND: Hard rain beating against windows...

PHOEBE

Listen to that rain! My, I'm glad you got the chinking daubing in.

CORDELL

Uh huh.

PHOEBE

Think how it would be pouring in this house.

CORDELL

Uh huh.

PHOEBE

Why, it would even be coming in through that window.

CORDELL

Uh huh.

PHOEBE

Les Cordell! Are you listening to me?

CORDELL

Why, yes...sure...

PHOEBE

Did you hear what I said about the rain?

CORDELL

I was just thinking...what the rain is doing to the soil. We need rain. But we need to control it after it hits the ground. I've tried cowpeas, but they only loosened up the soil so it would wash more. This mountain land is funny, Phoebe. You cultivate it, and it's all gone. Corn isn't meant for the mountains.

PHOEBE

Then you'd better do like those folks over in the Swiss colony do. They tell me they don't have any trouble with soil washing.

CORDELL

Say...that sounds right. Why didn't I think of that before?

PHOEBE

You've thought of everything else.

CORDELL

Yes, and here's the reason. When it rains like this, most of the other farmers go around with a shotgun on their shoulder. I stay in the house and read. I've talked to those Swiss folks...and I've read a lot lately. The Swiss keep their land with grass and manure. And I've been reading about how terraces are good for soil washing. Well, if the Swiss can do it, I can too!

ORGAN BRIDGE: HIGH ON A WINDY HILL.

ANNOUNCER

Work, work, more work, but ever with an eye toward building up the soil, proving that mountain farming in mountainous Grundy County could pay dividends--that was the life work of Les and Phoebe Cordell. It is a long road, a rocky road to the Cordell farm from Altamont, from Tracy City, from Palmer, but a reward to see the Cordell farm. And not so long ago his father came up from the Sequatchie Valley to see the farm he had, in his own words, "cleared, wore out, and throwed away." Les was pumping water for the pigs when he walked up...(FADE)

SOUND: Occasional oink of pigs, occasional splash of water...

FATHER (fading in)

...have to draw the water now, don't you?

CORDELL

Yep...sure wish it'd rain.

FATHER

It's that way everywhere, son. Down in the valley it's just as bad. Well, no rain, no soil erosion. That's the Pollyanna in me.

CORDELL

We don't have any soil erosion up here, dad. It's been a long fight, but we've won. Woods on the steep slopes, pastures and meadows with plenty of manure, terraces on all the land, a six-year rotation...

FATHER

Now, son...don't try to tell me you've become a soil conservationist.

CORDELL

Look at the farm and see for yourself.

FATHER (laughing)

I know. You've done something that I didn't think anyone could do. You've shown that mountain farming can pay. And when you came here thirty years ago, folks sighed and said, "We'll have to haul him off this fall."

ORGAN: Sneak in HIGH ON A WINDY HILL.

CORDELL

Dad, mountain farming can pay, if you treat the soil right. I've raised a family here. John, there, next to me--he's raising one. And we both know that if you treat the land right, if you farm it right, it will be here to stay. Not all of us can farm down in the valleys. But we can each of us, treat the land so that it will be here long after we're gone. Dad, I'm going on 56 years of age. I could farm this land so's I'd get all I could out of it for a few years--but I'd never forgive myself. I'd be giving worn out land to my boys and my girls, and to America. I won't do that.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER

That is the true story of T. L. Cordell, mountain farmer from mountainous Grundy County, Tennessee. And now, to carry on the story from a first-hand report we turn to the United States Department of Agriculture, and speaking for the Soil Conservation Service is Ewing Jones.

JONES

Thanks, _____. And first, I'd like for Walt Rogers to take the WLW mobile unit up to the Cordell farm.

ANNOUNCER

Why, Ewing?

JONES

Well sir, I will enlighten you. Charley Grisham and I went up there to the land of the sky last Monday, and as we bounced over the rocks and stumps, Charley kept saying, "Boy, I'd like to hear Walt Rogers as he drove the mobile unit up here." He said that about six times, and I'll agree with him, I don't think Walt would have a mobile unit after that.

ANNOUNCER

You mean, the road was a bit rough.

JONES

Slightly. The county agricultural agent, _____ Crooks, told us that we'd have to get a pack of bloodhounds to lead us to the place, but after bouncing all over Grundy County, I'm not putting any insurance on the bloodhounds.

ANNOUNCER

Seriously, Ewing, what did you find when you got up there--or did you?

JONES

_____, we found a farm, and I mean a farm. Charley Grisham will agree with me, I'm sure.

GRISHAM

Especially about the road, Ewing...and also about the farm, and the farmer.

JONES

He's a real farmer, isn't he?

GRISHAM

Yes, he is. I was most impressed by that philosophy of his--as he pointed out, when bad weather comes, many of the farmers in that area throw a shotgun across their shoulder and go tramping through the woods, but he stays home and reads farm magazines and listens to farm radio programs, and profits thereby. And I was impressed by his determination--both him and Mrs. Cordell. When the barn burned down, he cleared off the wreckage and sowed the land to red clover, and went to the woods to see what timber he had to get another barn.

JONES

I remember, his land was completely surrounded by woods. All except that one lane we entered.

GRISHAM

Good woods, too, as far as they go in Grundy County. And he's cooperating with the Triple-A, he's a unit demonstrator in cooperation with the TVA and the University of Tennessee Extension Service. And any man who would dig herbs--ginseng, I believe they were--and carry them on his back all the way to Palmer, is a man to admire. Then there were those terraces, Ewing...

JONES

Oh, yes...his first terraces didn't turn out so well. As I recall it, they weren't quite on the level, and they broke through in some places.

GRISHAM

But that didn't make him sour on terraces. He just went back and built them right, and now, as you know, they're holding the soil, making the water walk off the fields, instead of run--that is, when he gets rainfall, ~~which~~ he hopes is pretty soon.

JONES

Agreed--just like D. B. Patterson, another Grundy County farmer who, according to County Agent Crooks has done a swell job of controlling soil erosion. And now, Charley, since you've been up there--your final impressions of the Cordell farm...

GRISHAM

Well, Ewing...we haven't time to tell the real life story of Mr. and Mrs. Cordell. Here's a splendid example of the pioneering spirit and determination possessed by our forefathers--still existing in America. Mr. Cordell is a pioneer because he tried methods never before tried in mountain farming. As to his determination, only one look at the mountainous country of Grundy County and you quickly realize that only the heartiest and most determined can stick it out. But not only did Mr. and Mrs. Cordell "stick it out"...They made mountain farming pay, built a modern, up-to-date farm, a good home, educated their children... And enjoy the freedom and independence--the closeness to nature and God--that few of us are able to enjoy.

ORGAN: Sneak in DETP RIVER.

ANNOUNCER

ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

